1: Tew . E-4 (no date) 1950 FT7 Yao FT7

Kangomba, used to persuade Nyanja to help in the sacrificial rite. When Kapeni in turn fled to Mount Soche from the Ngoni, and died there, the Yao addressed their offerings to him, not to Kangomba.[1] The word *Mulungu* has sometimes been interpreted to mean Supreme Being, God, Creator, but among the Yao it seems not to have a personal connotation. It was used to describe the agent in any mysterious event,[2] or the place where the ancestor spirits (*masoka*) were supposed to dwell. Daily life was full of acts of respect towards the ancestors, who were regarded as jealous of the living, and requiring constant propitiation.[3]

Sorcery

Accusations of witchcraft and measures for dealing with it play a dominant role in Yao social life. With certain exceptions nearly all diseases and deaths are thought to be caused by sorcery. The exceptional causes are: the hand of God, old age, the transgression of certain taboos, and battle wounds. If sorcery is suspected the relatives of the sick or dead man consult the diviner to identify the offender.

Yao (in common with the Maravi and many peoples of Central Africa) believe that sorcerers have a craving for human flesh, which they satisfy by killing with magic the victims of their malice and hatred. They acquire their magical powers by an apprenticeship, which might include incestuous relations with mother, sister, or mother-in-law, or sleeping on the grave of the mother for one night. The sorcerer then learns the medicines and finally demonstrates his power by killing a young relative by magic; he waits till the victim is buried, and then magically exhumes him for the secret feast with his fellow sorcerers. Each sorcerer who shares the flesh owes a debt to the one who secured the victim.

Charms are used as preventive measures against sorcery. When a diviner has diagnosed the cause of death as sorcery, retaliatory measures are taken. The headmen of the village could either call in the witchfinder to identify the offender or he could call in the diviner to take action against all the sorcerers in the village. After the diviner, *Mabisalila*, had revealed the guilty ones, they were challenged to take the poison ordeal to prove their innocence. If they died, the proof and the punishment were simultaneously accomplished. If they survived, the diviner was held to have been at fault and they were acquitted. The witch doctor was supposed to entice sorcerers to the graveside, and slay them with magic more powerful than their own.

The diviner's findings are to-day checked by the poison ordeal administered to a chicken. A sorcerer detected in this way might be asked to provide medicine for the man whose sickness he had caused, or after a death he might be compelled to pay compensation. If the accused is a village headman, he will not be summoned before a chief, but his brother will take the villagers away from the sphere of his influence, or he may be chased away from the district. Accusations of sorcery follow certain regular lines. Nearly all accusations fall on relatives. Diviners are consulted by matrilineal relatives of the sick or dead person, and the man most usually accused is the brother of the accuser, or the husband of his sister. Witchcraft is therefore a manner of expressing the hostilities latent in these relations, which are, in the Yao social system, full of tension.

[1] Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, p. 70.
[2] Hetherwick, 3, 1902.
[3] Heckel, 1935, pp. 14–15; Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, pp. 58–75, 204–13.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

593 brother, is called *asyene mbumba*, or 'the warden of the sorority-group'. As one would expect among a matrilineal people, the link between a man and his mother and sisters is strong. But it is the link with his sister that is strongest. She relies on him for protection, particularly when she becomes ill, but also in her [582] relationships with her husband. Her brother will be her junior marriage surety, and he will give the consent which will allow a man to marry her. Also a woman's brother will have to consult [731] the diviner and find the medicines when she or her children sicken. In times of distress, as, for example, if her crops have failed, she will appeal to her brother for help. Similarly the man is dependent on his sister in a number of subtle ways. He can always rely on her for hospitality, and is able to get a meal from her if he needs it. But his dependence on his sisters for prestige is much more important. The significance of this will emerge when we see the *mbumba* organization in the light of the segmentation and fission of the lineage. A man can only found a new village if he has the full support of his sisters. A sister also plays a most important rôle at the birth of his children. She represents him both at the first fœtal-quickening ceremony and at the birth of his child, when she listens to the birth-pang confessions of his wife.[1]

At the same time the relations of sister and brother are restricted by custom. A man must never appear too familiar with his sister, especially in sexual matters. He may not, for example, [513] sleep in the same hut as she does; if she is away and he sleeps in her empty hut he must not make his bed in the place where she usually sleeps. He may not even sit on her sleeping mat. [835] Authentic cases of incest with a sister are extremely rare, whereas I recorded three or four cases of father–daughter incest while I was in the field. Supposed cases of brother–sister incest are recounted and discussed widely. This is understandable because [754] a man who is suspiciously familiar with his sister is suspected of being a sorcerer, since it is widely believed that a sorcerer usually obtains the power that he needs for the performance of his dire deeds by sleeping with his sister. The riddle of the initiands—'What is the sweetest fruit which may not be tasted?' Answer, 'Your sister'—neatly reflects the attitude of the Yao.

The close link of brother and sister is also reflected in the

[1] The significance of this is explained in Chap. VII, p. 185.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

Mwanace. He was the junior marriage surety to the marriage and it was his duty to go to the man's marriage surety, report the matter and arrange to take some action to get the man well again. Mwanace, however, refused to take any action. Instead he tauntingly said, 'Take the matter to Ali Kasunka, it is his village.' The woman did so, and Ali Kasunka asked immediately whether she had not taken the matter to Mwanace. She replied that she had and repeated Mwanace's words. Ali Kasunka took the matter up with Mwanace who now objected to being ordered about. Ali Kasunka, however, impressed on Mwanace that the village was his (Ali Kasunka's) and the authority rested with him. He then went to the man's home to tell them of Wayison's illness. The man's representative came and he and Ali Kasunka consulted a diviner. They found that the man was ill from *ndaka*, which he had contracted in his home village. They found medicine and treated him and he recovered.

Things came to a head in 1947. Mwanace's younger sister Nyangu II (D11) was married to a soldier who was away. One morning she came to her mother's elder sister, Mbalasyao (C1),[1] and told her that she had found semen on her pudenda and could not recall having had intercourse with anyone. Mbalasyao told Ali Kasunka about this. It was clearly a matter for divination and Ali Kasunka called Mwanace and told him that they ought to consult a diviner. But Mwanace's attitude, even in such a crisis as this, was hostile. He refused and said it was not his work to do this sort of thing. Ali Kasunka therefore went to a diviner with his sister Mbalasyao. The diviner said the semen was Mwanace's. He said that he had entered her hut magically and had sexual intercourse with her without her knowing it.[2] When Ali Kasunka got back to the village he called Mwanace and asked him what tricks he was playing in the village. Mwanace said that he had done nothing—it was not his village. Ali Kasunka then vaguely hinted at his crime. Mwanace pressed for more details and Ali Kasunka accused him outright of sleeping with his sister. He had hardly uttered the accusation before Mwanace had drawn a knife and attacked him. Mwanace was screaming something to the effect that Ali Kasunka had come to him with lies about having seen a diviner. Ali Kasunka beat off the attack and reiterated the accusation. Mwanace now turned his rage upon the woman and tried to catch her. Two of the men in the village then caught Mwanace and subdued

[1] Her mother, Amaliama, was dead.

[2] This is called *cigonecesya*. It combines the use of magic with sister-incest. To the Yao mind there could be no clearer proof of sorcery. I have already mentioned the importance of sister-incest in relationship to the beliefs surrounding the sorority-group. See p. 146.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

The father of one of my servants helped to clear out the remains of a body from his grain store on one occasion and shortly afterwards, it is supposed that his own sons who had said they could not allow it to go on any longer, employed some one to kill him, as he was found, one day, with his head smashed in. There are, I believe, a number of similar cases known.

A person is supposed to gain the powers of *usawi* by procuring medicine from some one willing to sell his secrets at a price, and by performing certain rites usually connected with his method of bathing. It is said that "such and such a one takes his bath on the top of an ant hill" or "on the roof of his house by moonlight." The usual initiation into *usawi* is a long business, the individual being successively initiated into all the various practices of *ubusa*, the supernatural. Medicines are made from a still-born child, from various plants, from the hyaena, etc., and used for preparing the individual in the new science. He is introduced to the hyaena, the fox, etc. It is also asserted that a man may acquire supernatural powers by having sexual intercourse with a near relative, a sister or mother. I have had pointed out to me an old man who is said to have wished thus to acquire power but the women refused and he has been a laughing-stock ever since.

On one occasion, a man related to me the pathetic life story of his attempt to find his favorite sister who, like himself, had been taken away to the coast as a slave. In desperation he has adopted the above procedure to try to gain supernatural powers to help him but without result. It would therefore seem to be a method not particularly associated with *usawi*.

The *mawi* is supposed to bring about the death of his victim not by administering poison or other such direct means, but by the more subtle mode of making medicine "against" him. When the victim has succumbed and is in due course buried, the *mawi* arrives at the grave to secure that for which he has been working. To the *mawi* is attributed the power of making himself invisible, and of taking the form of an animal; owing to the carrion-eating habits of the hyaena, this animal form is most commonly taken. Other animal forms which are associated with the *mawi* are the leopard, the fox, and the owl, all night-going animals. The Yao say, "The cry of the fox (jackal) is heard at night because he associates with *usawi* doings."

Arrived at the grave after sunset, the *mawi* blows his horn, the horn of a small antelope, to call his brethren; a fire with a blue flame is made by the grave and around it they dance, or the grave may be illuminated by blue flame without a visible fire. The *mawi* calls upon the deceased to rise from the grave, addressing him by the name he bore before he was initiated, i.e. his child-name. Obeying the summons, the dead man rises to the surface of the ground, though how he comes out is not quite clear — "the hole may be ever so small." The risen dead is then killed again by magic medicine and his body divided to be eaten by the congregation of *wasawi*. It is said that the skull is made into a gourd, the eyes are used as beads, and the ribs formed into a girdle.

11: Sanderson D-5 (ca. 1920) 1920 FT7 Yao FT7

The alternative term, *weer*, common to nearly all Bantu languages, is usually reserved for "own father," but not always. 601

Latterly, though the relationship is really *akwanjo*, the husbands of a man's "daughters" or "grand-daughters" are called *atati*—in a complimentary sense, not of course in defining relationship.

The word *akwego* is rapidly falling into desuetude for men, and is, nowadays, never used in speaking to a man of that relationship, though used freely as a mode of address to women.

Amao (or *achikulu-wangu*, *-wao*, etc., "my, his mother") may be further defined as "great" or "little" in the same manner as *atati*.

The parents of any *atati* or *amao*, and those of one's wife are called *ambuje* ("grandparent"). Great-grandparents are specified as "father" or "mother of my grandfather (or mother)."

The founder of a family is called *Likolo*, especially in prayer—except for the augmentative prefix obviously the same word as *Nangolo*, "a parent," which includes all "fathers" and "mothers." [782]

It is curious in this connection that a name for little girls in general, if one does not know their real name, is *chikolo*. All these words seem to be derived from *-kola* ("have," "possess"), and refer, probably, either to actual or potential possession of offspring.

Achinangolo are distinguished as "male" or "female" according as they belong to the father's or mother's side—irrespective of their own sex.

Conclusions.—The Yao nomenclature of relationships, bearing as it does the evidence of former group marriages, is, like other classificatory systems, gradually changing in conformity with the development of the race, so that it can be used to express consanguinity; Rivers has, I believe, called attention to this process. 601 178 [121]

The Yao custom—now dying out—of lending one's wife to a visitor (usually a close friend) may be a remnant of ideas carried on from communal marriage, though such a privilege is never given to a relative. [835] [514]

In the same way a man who has had no children (a great stigma) may request his friend to help him—he will never ask a relative—and all of the three parties will keep the secret of the true paternity of any children resulting. [837] [840]

In many tribes the marriage of brother and sister, or a man with his sister's child, is permitted to compensate for the law by which a man's property goes to the son of a stranger, but nothing of the kind is allowed among the Yaos. Indeed, they view any incestuous union with particular horror, and such must be very rare. I have heard of a case of a man committing incest with the idea that he would thereby become endued with supernatural power, but all he gained was ostracism; in the old days he would have been burned. 588 835 [624]